The Comprehensive History of Seydikemer

Introduction: The Ancient Soul of a Young District

While **Seydikemer** is one of Muğla's youngest districts administratively, established in 2012, its modern name conceals a civilizational heritage that stretches back thousands of years. This geography, sprawling between the majestic slopes of the Western Taurus Mountains and the fertile Eşen Plain (the ancient Xanthos Valley), was the very heart of Lycia, one of the most unique and democratic civilizations of antiquity. To truly understand Seydikemer, therefore, requires a journey not just within its modern borders, but deep into history, into the legends and monuments of the "Land of Light."

Antiquity: The Golden Triangle of Lycia

Seydikemer formed the political, religious, and social center of the region by housing three of the most significant cities of ancient Lycia—Tlos, Pinara, and Letoon—within its bounds like a golden triangle. These cities were among the most powerful members of the Lycian League and shaped the destiny of the region.

Tlos: The Unconquerable Metropolis

Believed to be the "Dalawa" mentioned in Hittite texts, Tlos is one of the oldest settlements in the region, with a history of 4,000 years. It was known as "unconquerable" throughout history thanks to its steep acropolis, a natural fortress

overlooking the Eşen Plain. At the peak of the acropolis, the ruins of a fortress from the Ottoman period reveal the layers of history. On the city's slopes lie its stadium, a magnificent bath complex with six arches (known as Yedi Kapı or "Seven Gates"), an agora, a council building, and a monumental theatre. The most famous symbol of Tlos is the grand rock-cut tomb depicting the mythological hero Bellerophon on his winged horse Pegasus, battling the monster Chimera.

Letoon: The Sacred Oracular Center

Letoon was not a city but a federal sanctuary, a common center for worship and prophecy for all Lycian cities. It was home to three temples built in honor of the goddess Leto and her children, Apollo and Artemis. The sacred spring and nymphaeum (monumental fountain) at the center of the site are considered the birthplace of the Leto myth. One of the finds that makes Letoon world-famous is the trilingual stele discovered in 1973, bearing a text in Lycian, Greek, and Aramaic. This stele played a key role in deciphering the Lycian language. The site was inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List** in 1988, along with Xanthos.

Pinara: The City of Rock Tombs and a Unique Theatre

According to legend, Pinara was founded by colonists from an overpopulated Xanthos. The city resembles a honeycomb with hundreds of rock-cut tombs carved into the face of a steep mountain. These tombs range from simple hollows to magnificent temple-facade monuments. Another structure that makes Pinara unique is its small theatre and odeon, built in an unusual, almost heart-shaped plan. As one of the major cities with three votes in the Lycian League, Pinara held a significant place in the region's social and political life.

Other Important Centers: Sidyma and Oinoanda

Besides these three major cities, the ancient city of Sidyma stands out with its Roman-era ruins intertwined with the modern village of Dodurga. Oinoanda, located on a high plateau, is famous for the colossal philosophical inscription of Diogenes, which detailed Epicurean philosophy on the wall of a massive stoa. This inscription is one of the longest and most comprehensive philosophical texts to survive from the ancient world.

The Flow of History: From Rome to the Republic

During the "Pax Romana" (Roman Peace) of the Roman Empire, the Lycian cities continued to prosper, enriched by new roads, aqueducts, and baths. The historical bridge that gives the Kemer neighborhood its name is a relic of this period. In the Byzantine era, with the spread of Christianity, cities like Tlos and Pinara became bishoprics, but they were gradually abandoned due to Arab raids and earthquakes. With the arrival of the Turks and the subsequent Ottoman rule, the stones of the ancient cities began to be repurposed in local architecture, and the nomadic "Yörük" culture became dominant in the region.

The Modern Era: The Birth of Seydikemer

In the early years of the Republic, the area was a collection of scattered villages and highland settlements belonging to Fethiye, sustained by agriculture and animal husbandry. Over time, as Kemer emerged as a prominent town, the region's growing population and potential necessitated a new administrative structure. On November 12, 2012, through Law No. 6360, the town of Kemer and surrounding villages were united to officially establish **Seydikemer** as the 13th district of Muğla. Today, the district is known not only for its leadership in greenhouse farming and agriculture but also for its tourism potential, featuring natural wonders like the Saklıkent Canyon and the unparalleled ancient heritage it holds.

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